

## HISTORICAL CONTACT-TRACING IN DENMARK

A Postscript to the Meeting of the M.S.S.V.D. in Copenhagen, June 5 to 9, 1963

BY

R. S. MORTON

*The Royal Hospital, Sheffield*

James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, was the third and last husband of Mary, Queen of Scots. He died, a prisoner, at Dragsholm in Zeeland, Denmark, on April 9, 1578. There is evidence that death was preceded by madness. When this is taken together with the view that Darnley, the Queen's previous husband, had syphilis (Davison, 1956), the possibility that Bothwell died of general paralysis of the insane cannot be ignored.

The event of our meeting in Copenhagen offered me an opportunity to view the reputed remains of Bothwell. This visit within a visit has given the stimulus to review an era when the histories of Scotland and Denmark were closely interwoven. From it all, two ends are served. First, a little can be added to medical history, and secondly, the marked contrast between the eventual hospitality offered to Bothwell and that which we enjoyed will help to remind us of the many collective and individual kindnesses of our Danish hosts.

Bothwell came from a family which had long served the Scottish Court. Born in 1535, he received his education in France. Although a Protestant he served, Mary, Queen of Scots, faithfully and boldly. Bothwell is generally considered profligate but he was not perfidious. Davison (1956) says he was "immoral rather than amoral". Brantôme, a French historian (quoted by Marryat, 1860) who knew Bothwell in his earlier days in Paris, describes him as "the ugliest and awkwardest of men". John Knox alluded to him as "quite otherwise than handsome and wanting in those external advantages which ordinarily help to captivate" (Dickinson, 1949).

Following the feuds, which resulted from Mary's return to Scotland to take up her Queenship, Bothwell was imprisoned and banished for 3 years. The period ended only after the Queen's marriage to Darnley in July, 1565. Before the birth of James VI on July 19, 1566, Mary and Darnley were already

estranged and the Queen's partiality for Bothwell was widely rumoured. On October 7, 1566, in his capacity of Lieutenant of the Borders, Bothwell was engaged in bringing law and order to those parts and had his famous duel with Jock Elliot o' the Park, an outlaw of notoriety. The two men came face to face, alone, in a wood. Mutual recognition appears to have been instantaneous. After firing and wounding Elliot, Bothwell gave chase on foot, but stumbled on a tree stump and was stunned in the fall. This may have accounted for the forehead scar which he bore to the end of his days although the more generally accepted story is that Elliot viewing his adversary on the ground returned to the attack and inflicted wounds not only to the forehead but to a hand and thigh also. Bothwell's strength and courage, however, carried the day, and he stabbed Elliot twice in the breast (Schiern, 1880).

Nine days later, on October 16, Mary visited Bothwell for 2 hours from Jedburgh, making the round trip of 36 miles on horseback the same day; 5 days later he joined her, being brought from Liddersdale by litter. Mary had already been ill for 4 days after a haematemesis, and such havoc did shock, dehydration, and blood loss wreak that mourning dresses were ordered. The Queen's surgeon, Arnault, "a perfect man at his craft", was hard put to it to save her life. Darnley paid his sick wife a belated visit on October 28. The details of these events are important. The comings and goings of Bothwell and the Queen have brought suggestions that the parties were cohabiting. This seems in the circumstances unlikely, but there is much in these events to nurture mutual concern, respect, and warm friendship, if nothing else.

When the recovered Mary reached Peebles on November 5, she received a letter from Darnley which distressed her greatly. I have already suggested that this may have accused Mary or at least warned

her that the sender was infected with syphilis (Morton, 1962). Davison (1956) lists the evidence that Darnley had syphilis and I find no cause to disagree with him. One added reason in confirmation (that he was treated with mercury firstly at Glasgow in December and January) is found in Schiern's book (p. 44), where we learn that Darnley was provided with "ane auld purple bed" at Kirk o' Fields for the nights before his final bath on February 8.

Evidence in support of Mary's alleged adultery with Bothwell during the relevant period comes from several sources. Firstly there are Buchanan's accusations as noted above. These were contained in a pamphlet published in 1571, at first anonymously but later recognized as the work of Buchanan, a humanist, historian, and reformer, and sometime tutor to Mary, Queen of Scots. After the death of Darnley he became propagandist-in-chief of the anti-Marians.

Secondly, we have the evidence of Nicolas Hubert "or, as he is also called after his native place, Paris", who was in the Queen's service. At one time he had also served Bothwell. Paris completed two depositions before being executed in 1569. These show him to have been running with letters and messages between Mary and Bothwell at Callander in January while the couple were on their way to Glasgow, and to have had knowledge of Bothwell's being taken to the Queen's room at night while the King (Darnley) was at Kirk o' Fields.

Thirdly, there are the sonnets allegedly written by Mary and produced at her examination at Westminster, with the so-called "casket letters". One sonnet in particular can readily be taken as confirmation that she had already given herself to Bothwell before the border meetings of October, 1566.

These strong suggestions and others that point to the Queen being the mistress of Bothwell are of course opposed by a series of writings acquitting her of any connexion with Bothwell before he carried her off to Dunbar on April 24, 1567. Reviewing the evidence I find myself in agreement with Schiern (p. 191) when he says, "Without this supposition [of pre-marital intercourse] it is difficult to understand how she [the Queen] could so shortly after Darnley's death agree to marry the Earl, to marry one who had recently been accused of being the murderer of Darnley". The marriage took place with Protestant rites in Edinburgh on May 15, 1567.

The union was short-lived. Scandalized, even Mary's warmest friends and supporters deserted her. Public opinion was never more decisively split. The authority of Bothwell's power and position and all his assured loyalty could not prevail against a

confederacy of nobles. The battle of Carberry Hill in mid-June, 1567, is indeed a great story of personal courage by the couple and shows all the tender bitterness of enforced parting, conducted, alas, in public but with rare dignity. Mary was led prisoner to Edinburgh. There is nothing in Mary's medical history, so clearly set down by MacNalty (1960), to suggest that she had syphilis. It might be added that her miscarriage of Bothwell's twins at 11 weeks is too early a mishap of pregnancy to be considered specific in origin.

Bothwell contrived his escape from Carberry Hill, first making his way to Dunbar and later seeking refuge with relatives in the north where as High Admiral he took command of a few ships. Pursuit was immediate and in a subsequent naval action he escaped thanks to a gale which drove him east to Norway. On arrival he and all with him were viewed with the gravest suspicion. The Scandinavian Seven Years' War was in progress and all suspected of privateering were searched and thoroughly investigated. It was thought that Bothwell might go over to the Swedes and for this reason the Norwegians sent him, prisoner, for safe keeping to their allies in Denmark. At the end of the year he was transferred from Copenhagen to Malmö, then Danish.

We may pause for a little to look for a moment at the relations between Scotland and Denmark at this time. Trade between the two was brisk in spite of domestic preoccupations. There was much interchange of students, especially between Aberdeen and Copenhagen, or as the Scots of the time knew it "Cawpmanhawin". There were at least four Scottish professors in Copenhagen, including Alexander Kinghorn in the Medical Faculty (Werlauff, 1850). The Scots had their own guild in Denmark, established in 1539 by Christian III as "a grace to the Scottish nation" (Hofman, 1765-80). The Scots also had their own ecclesiastical institutions in the city and after the Reformation "Scottish beds" were founded for the care of sick countrymen. For long, Scots mercenaries had held a place of honour among the élite of Continental soldiery. At the time of Bothwell's escape many were serving Frederick III in the Seven Years' War. Doubtlessly in part because of these connexions and respects Bothwell was well treated in these early years in Denmark. Indeed, Frederick voted him a pension that he might maintain himself in a reasonable state, and he appears to have done so for at least 5 years. On June 16, 1573, however, he was removed to Dragsholm Castle in Zealand. It was at this time reported by "a man lately out of Sweden" that Lord Bothwell was "stark mad and had long been so". The strict confinement which he now suffered may well have

been prompted by his condition for such was standard treatment of the mentally deranged in Tudor times. There is evidence from other sources that Bothwell was insane. His former friend Lord Herries wrote "he went mad and died". Another says he "fell into a frenzy".

That death at Dragsholm and burial at the nearby church of Faareveile followed appears undoubted. A Danish calendar contains an entry by a Danish nobleman, Eiler Brockenhuus, "In the year 1578 on 14th April the Scottish earl died at Dragsholm and was buried in the same church. His name was James Hephune [*sic*] Earl of Bothwell".

For 300 years a local tradition persisted and grew that a nameless coffin in the Adeler family vault in Faareveile Church contained the body of the earl. In fact, Gore-Browne (1937) wrote that the people of the district retained a sort of folk memory of his imprisonment and spoke of him with pity. Through promptings by the local schoolmaster, the coffin—one of several in the vault—was opened in May, 1858, in the presence of the Chaplain of the British Legation (a fact which Bothwell would have found gratifying). In the simple white oak coffin was found a well-preserved mummified body. It was that of a man 5 ft. 6 in. tall, aged about 50, and with reddish hair streaked with grey. He had a scar on his forehead. Horace Marryat (1860), who examined the body a year later, said it was that of an "ugly Scotsman". Later Professor Ibsen, a kindlier and certainly more discerning man, said the head "had an unmistakable Scottish cast".

Gore-Browne quoted Jusserand, who examined the body in 1900, as reserving his judgment as to whether or not the body was Bothwell's. Professors Ibsen and Hansen declared it to be so, but Worsaae (1861-62) quoted Prof. Ibsen as saying only that the body was that of a Scot—quite a different thing. All, however, seem to be agreed that the skull was not Danish.

Apart from John Knox's brief note of Bothwell's facial features already given, I have been unable to trace any description whatever of the Earl's appearance. Two portraits exist. One of these is by Otto Bach and was painted in oils in 1861 from a photograph of the Faareveile skull. The other, stated by the National Portrait Gallery in Edinburgh to be a fully authenticated portrait, is a miniature with a companion portrait of Bothwell's first wife. Both miniatures are dated 1566. The artist is unknown. I am advised that attempts to apply superimposition photographic techniques to miniature and skull would not be fruitful.

The body remained exhumed till 1935, when Gore-Browne records he saw it replaced in the chapel

crypt at Faareveile. He was in no doubt that the body was Bothwell's.

So tradition grew among tourists and Danes alike, nurtured respectively by Gore-Browne's book and by the scholarly work of Schiern published in Danish in 1863 and later translated and published in English in 1880. Visitors attended service at the little white-washed church at Faareveile, with its conglomeration of architectural styles in fabric and furnishings, and afterwards sought permission to descend to the vaulted crypt to view the body. Ageing Scottish spinsters, no doubt cherishing girlhood fantasies, came with their sprigs of white heather to pay tribute. The body, so it seems, became business.

That the record may be straight at least to historians and medievalists, a commission was established in 1938 to determine the authenticity or otherwise of the remains. With a delightful twist of irony the chairman was a professor of anatomy born and bred in Faareveile, whose education was said to have been furnished by the proceeds of tourism based on the Bothwell story. The proceedings of the commission remain unpublished and are housed in the National Museum archives and in the archives of the Institute of Anatomy. I am grateful to Dr. Christiansen of the National Museum for much of what follows which he told me when we visited Faareveile together to view the body and coffin now housed in a hermetically-sealed glass case in a small room adjoining the church.

Of about twenty bodies found in the crypt in 1938—an unlikely place for a medieval prisoner to be buried—some were identifiable. All were believed to date from about 1700. The wood, shroud remnants, silks, and paper trimmings of the body and coffin were in keeping with this dating. Dried flowers and especially hops contained in the coffin for the purpose of disinfection and deodorization match the habit of those times. An x ray of the body gave negative results. The forehead scar described by Gore-Browne was an area of depigmentation only.

The last fact I confirmed by observation and found no evidence of scars on the remaining skin of hands or thighs, such as might have been expected on Bothwell's remains, from his duel with Jock Elliot o'the Park. There was no penile scar. The skull, covered with tightly-drawn mummified skin, was empty.

All the evidence, therefore, is against the body's being that of Bothwell, and further pursuit of evidence of syphilis is fruitless. We must content ourselves with the fact that James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, is not the first syphilis contact we have failed to trace, and we can but hope that he may yet present himself.

My thanks are due to Dr. and Mrs. Christiansen who accompanied me and so royally entertained me on my visit to Faareveile.

## REFERENCES

- Brockenhuus, E. (1578). "Historiske Kalenderantegnelser". These notes were inserted in a printed calendar and have been edited in "Samlinger til Fyens historie og topografi" (1873), vol. 6, pp. 291-464, and by G. Bang (1894-95). *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 6 rk., vol. 5, pp. 681-95.
- Davison, M. H. A. (1956). "Scottish Society of the History of Medicine: Report of Proceedings, Session 1955-56", p.20.
- Dickinson, W. C., ed. (1949). "John Knox: History of the Reformation in Scotland", vol. 2, pp. 94, 97. Nelson, London.
- Gore-Browne, R. (1937). "Lord Bothwell". Collins, London.
- Hofman, H. de (1765-80). "Samlinger af publice og private Stiftelser, Foundationer og Gavebreve", vol. 10, pp. 155-157. Copenhagen.
- MacNalty, A. S. (1960). "Mary, Queen of Scots". Johnson, London.
- Marryat, H. (1860). "A Residence in Jutland, the Danish Islands, and Copenhagen", vol. 1, pp.409-19. Murray, London.
- Morton, R. S. (1962). *Brit. J. vener. Dis.*, 38, 175.
- Resen, P. H. (1680). "Kong Frederichs den Andens Krønike".
- Schiern, F. (1880). "Life of James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell", trans. D. Berry. Douglas, Edinburgh.
- Werlauff, E. C. (1850). "Kjøbenhavns Universitet fra dets Stiftelse indtil Reformationen", pp.60-72. Copenhagen.
- Worsaae, J. J. A. (1861-62). *Illustreret Tidende*, 3, 145-148.